

Learning to be silent: theological and philosophical reflections on silence and transcendence

Abstract

‘Libère-moi de la trop longue parole.’ (Maurice Blanchot, *Le pas au-delà*, 1973)

Michèle le Doeuff suggested that theology rests upon a prior silencing of philosophy; the work of Jean-Yves Lacoste is unconcerned with any strict distinction between the disciplines where theology is an unsystematic, fragmentary and, above all, *ethical* activity, reminiscent of Stoker’s account of Derrida and the fourth type of messianic transcendence. While suffering can reduce theology to silence this does not mean that it reduces it to nothingness: in being silenced theology finds itself reduced to its essentials: the *theologia viatorum* of man and not the theology of angels; a way of existing rather than simply a province of transcendent knowledge. Philosophy also has its own ‘*moment silencieux*’ in which its theorizing collapses and *com*-passion is perhaps the only response. This paper examines the philosophical and theological implications of “being silent”, and the relationship between silence and solitude, and the difficulty or even the necessity of keeping silent.

It argues that keeping silent is an immanent activity conducted in the ‘mundane reality’ of this world; an activity of *kenosis*. Silence indicates the concealment of self and the individual’s withdrawal from society and yet, in a religious or liturgical setting, one often – paradoxically – keeps silence in company, an act which aims to reinforce human solidarity. Contemplation is, in economic terms, a “waste of time” that confounds models of work and industry and represents the interruption of the everyday and the delimitation of an alternative (ethical) space and time, one given over to contemplation of oneself and one another.

For Blanchot silence provided “the space of literature”: language risked destroying the singularity of being, while preserving its being in general, which for Hegel revealed the “divine nature” of and the Cartesian contented understanding that all thought is language. And yet ‘silence exists; “it is not death and it is not speech”...something that is neither indifference nor discourse’, a ‘frozen analysis’ that can be suddenly ‘tempted by song’ reminiscent of the ‘Silent music, Sounding solitude, The supper that refreshes, and deepens love’ found in Christian spirituality.

Silence has as many different possibilities as speech; although representative of Stoker’s radical second type, through his pseudonyms Kierkegaard explored particular forms of silence. Silence is the cessation of speech, not for the lack of anything to say, but deliberately and intentionally. Such muteness is not simply the negation of speech; it can be an occasion for a listening that respects the integrity (finitude) of matter, the individual, and the Other. Silence is rich and varied – and perhaps “being silent” speaks most of all about transcendence. Silence is also then an act of *ascesis*, a stripping away of attitudes, mental images and ideas that cuts across notions of radical immanence and transcendence, of a purely textual reality and into non-linguistic forms of culture.

Introduction

In his introductory typology of transcendence Wesel Stoker’s identifies the French thinker Jean-Luc Marion (along with Søren Kierkegaard) as exemplifying his second type, that of *radical* transcendence. The work of Marion has been closely associated with the question of ontotheology,

the *bête noire* of postmodernity, particularly his argument for a “God *without* being”¹. Emmanuel Levinas’ own attempt to escape a Western philosophical tradition that he felt that had entailed “a destruction of transcendence” was guided by Plato’s phrase “beyond being” (*epekeina tes ousias*) and sought both an ethical transcendence and to refute the suggestion of Jacques Derrida (that other *bête noire* of postmodernity) that the Greek *logos* had the power ‘to encompass whatever stood outside it’². Yet as Joeri Schrijvers has noted ‘both Levinas and Marion insist that the problem of ontotheology has not yet been overcome’³. Both thinkers are indebted to the analysis of Martin Heidegger that ontotheology permeates the entirety of Western philosophy: for instance, in *The Idol and Distance* Marion identifies in Plato’s idea of the Good, Aristotle’s divine self-thinking, the One of Plotinus and Aquinas’ five ways a ‘concept that makes a claim to equivalence with God’⁴. The problem of ontotheology, as Schrijvers has suggested, is not ‘that God is used all too easily in philosophical discourse nor is it a “bad theological response to a good philosophical question.”’⁵ On the contrary, ‘the emphasis of the [onto-theological] constitution is not at all on the *theos* but on the *logos*.’⁶ Marion alludes to this dominance of logic and theoretical discourse throughout the history of philosophy when he states that ‘the theological character of ontology does not have to do with the fact that Greek metaphysics was later taken up and transformed by the ecclesial theology of Christianity,’⁷ nor with the fact that the God of the Christian revelation has passed into Greek thought, since ‘this passage itself became possible only inasmuch as, first and foremost, [...] Greek thought [is] constituted [ontotheologically].’⁸ God has thus not entered philosophy because of ‘an inappropriate Hellenization of the Christian God’ – it was because Greek thought was ‘*already*

¹ Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995)

² Emmanuel Levinas, ‘God and Philosophy,’ *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp.129-148; p.129.

³ Joeri Schrijvers, ‘Marion, Levinas, and Heidegger on the question concerning ontotheology’ *Continentental Philosophy Review* 43 (2010) pp.207–239; p.208.

⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), pp. 9, 13, 10.

⁵ Joeri Schrijvers, ‘Marion, Levinas, and Heidegger on the question concerning ontotheology’ *Continentental Philosophy Review* 43 (2010) pp.207–239; pp.211-12.

⁶ Bernard Mabile, *Hegel, Heidegger et la métaphysique* (Paris: Vrin, 2004), pp. 122, 144, cited in Schrijvers, p.212.

⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), p. 16, referring to Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 287–288.

⁸ *God Without Being*, p.64.

predisposed towards *to theion* that the God of revelation could be caught into philosophy's web.'⁹ It is this ontotheological constitution which ultimately silences God.

By contrast, in *Hipparchia's Choice*¹⁰, Michèle le Doeuff has suggested that theology rests upon a prior silencing of philosophy; the work of the phenomenologist and theologian Jean-Yves Lacoste, at the borderland between philosophy and theology, is unconcerned with any strict distinction between the disciplines. Like Marion, Lacoste is concerned with the shape of a post-metaphysical and post-Heideggerian theology, freed from the spectre of onto-theology; unlike Marion, who in his own riposte to Heidegger 'redraws the border between theology and philosophy'¹¹, Lacoste is not interested in any such distinction. Whereas his early work was located in what Donald Mackinnon¹² called the "borderlands of theology" – a border area that, 'insofar as we understand it, is defined either by a co-belonging or by an uncertain belonging'¹³ – by Lacoste's own admission his work tries to move 'above and beyond the division between the philosophical and the theological'¹⁴.

Levinas' project was grounded in his conviction that the 'philosophical discourse of the West claims the amplitude of an all-encompassing structure or of an ultimate comprehension. It compels every other discourse to justify itself before philosophy.' Theology, he felt, 'accepts this vassalage'.¹⁵ But '[c]an knowledge itself capture God? As soon as it is asked, one has to admit that that question is a hypocritical one.' Only one discipline, theology, 'seizes God inside a propositional

⁹ Schrijvers, p.212 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁰ Michele le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice: An Essay Concerning, Women, Philosophy, etc*, trans. Trista Selous (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

¹¹ Cyril O'Regan, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Unwelcoming of Heidegger', in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler (eds.), *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2010), pp.264-298; p.267. According to O'Regan, 'Marion refuses to accept the terms of relation between (phenomenological-ontological) philosophy and theology intimated in *Being and Time* (1927), declared in the essay 'Phenomenology and Theology' (1928), reiterated in the Zurich lecture of 1951, and performed in the 25-year interim.'

¹² Donald M. MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968).

¹³ « La zone frontalière, telle que nous l'entendons se définit par la double appartenance, soit par une appartenance incertaine... », Jean-Yves Lacoste, 'Témoignage mystique et expérience philosophique', *Présence et parousie* (Geneva : Ad Solem, 2006), pp.193-219 ; p.194.

¹⁴ « Les études ici réunies ne prétendent pas se placer une fois pour toutes en amont de la division du philosophique et du théologique. Elles tentent toutefois de la faire. » Jean-Yves Lacoste, 'Liminaire', *La phénoménalité de Dieu: neuf études* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008), pp.9-11; p.9.

¹⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, 'God and Philosophy,' *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp.129-148; p.129.

language that is intended to be cognitive: well trained on one hand, true on the other.’¹⁶

So is, asks Lacoste, the problem ‘with theology nothing more than that of its language?’¹⁷ If so, then silence, he suggests, offers us ‘a healthy lesson in theological epistemology’¹⁸. Silence is often seen in a negative sense – it can represent discomfiture, anger, dejection, concession or simply “being at a loss”.¹⁹ Even when and where silence is valued, it is still within a negative register – for instance, as the absence of and respite from work and noise. Blaise Pascal was terrified by the vastness of the universe; it was not its size but its silence that terrified him: ‘*le silence éternel de ces espaces infinies m’effraie*’. As Nicholas Lash observes, the ‘empty stillness of the sky speaks silently to human solitude’²⁰ producing a ‘solitude that is unnerving’²¹; this intersubjective ethical register is of particular interest for theology.

As a phenomenologist Lacoste is interested in the human aptitude for experience; as a theologian, in the possibilities of human religious experience (although this does not place him amongst those representatives of the first, immanent, type of transcendence). This essay proposes to examine (by reference to the Husserlian phenomenology only briefly mentioned) some of the philosophical and religious aspects of silence, beginning with its specifically ontological aspects and followed by its theological, liturgical and ethical dimensions, and to suggest how the rich polysemy of silence in fact cuts across the typologies identified by Stoker. Along the way, we shall reflect on the philosophical and theological implications of “being silent”, and the relationship between silence and solitude, and the difficulty and even the necessity of keeping silent.

1) The ontological status of silence

i) The phenomenality of silence

¹⁶ « Un savoir peut-il se saisir de Dieu? La question, autant l’avouer, aussitôt que posée, est une question hypocrite. Une discipline au moins, la théologie, tient sur Dieu un langage propositionnel qui se veut cognitif : bien formé d’une part, vrai d’autre part. », Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Étude IX: « *Resurrectio carnis* » Du savoir théologique à la connaissance liturgique’, *La phénoménalité de Dieu: neuf études* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008), pp.205-227; p.205.

¹⁷ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, *Présence et parousie* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2006), pp.169-191; p.169.

¹⁸ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, p.172.

¹⁹ Jean-Luc Egger, “Ganz und gar gegenwärtig”: Forma e silenzio nel pensiero di Max Picard,’ *Sapienza* 52:2 (1999), pp.143-96; pp.143-44.

²⁰ Nicholas Lash, ‘Attending to Silence’, *Holiness, Speech and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p.77.

²¹ Lash, ‘Attending to Silence’, p.78.

Silence must exist, as a necessary condition for sound, particularly music, itself to exist. Even if John Cage is correct to affirm²² – following his experiences in an anechoic chamber – that there is always noise, and that our bodily existence is always accompanied by noise (even if it is only the sound of our own circulatory and nervous systems) then one also has to admit that there is also silence, even if it is not absolute. The indeterminate state of silence raises the question, alongside the ontological one, of how this silence phenomenalisises itself.

The very phenomenality of silence suggests that rather than a negative phenomenon – the mere absence of something – silence is in fact a complex and positive phenomenon. For Max Scheler, writing in 1913, the fact that persons, ‘can be silent and keep their thought to themselves...is quite different from simply saying nothing. It is an active attitude.’²³ Bernard Dauenhauer²⁴ summarises the thesis of Max Picard’s *The World of Silence* thus: silence is an ontological principle; in belonging to almost every dimension of human activity and the world which it inhabits, it is one of the “forces” that constitute the human world, a constitutive principle distinct from (although associated with) other forces such as spirit and word. Dauenhauer’s analysis is, of course, not explicitly theological, although acknowledging that ‘Picard speaks of a type of discourse, the discourse of faith, which responds to the absolute word, to God. This discourse is prayer.’²⁵

Silence is, of course, usually connected with such discourse, and Dauenhauer’s analysis argues that the complexity of discourse is crucial to the discovery of the complexity of silence, which Dauenhauer suggests ‘occurs and is encountered only as somehow linked to some, active, as opposed to spontaneous, human performances...most obviously...those performances which engender sounds [such as] cries, speech, and music.’²⁶ But silence ‘also occurs in conjunction with human performances in which no sounds are engendered...such as...private reading...painting and

²² John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p.8.

²³ Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), p.225.

²⁴ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p.vii.

²⁵ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p.188.

²⁶ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p.3.

sculpture.’²⁷ Indeed, Jean-Louis Chrétien has written eloquently on “silence in painting”: ‘it is with *our* silence that we listen to the silence in painting: two antiphonic silences, two silences that respond to one another, give one another a fresh start, and in a certain sense embrace one another. [...] And silence in painting, when it is truly silent, *calls* forth our silence too: we can be speaking with a friend in a museum or gallery, when all of a sudden a picture imposes silence upon us.’²⁸

However, in those activities Dauenhauer concentrates upon ‘just as in hearing sounds, one can be so distracted or so preoccupied that the work in question does not convey what it could convey. Silence in such cases is experienced as absent.’²⁹ But there is, however, a difference between the experience of absence and absence itself and silence is not merely linked to some active human performance – it is itself an active performance, ‘neither muteness nor mere absence of audible sound.’³⁰ Muteness, according to Dauenhauer, is ‘simply the inarticulateness of that which is incapable of any sort of signifying performances...silence necessarily involves conscious activity’ and as such ‘the occurrence or nonoccurrence of passively encountered noise, can neither prevent or produce silence.’ In this, Dauenhauer underestimates the capacity of intrusive and unwanted noise to both distract and disturb us – in short, its interruptive capacity, which as Kraut acknowledges in his use of the term “assassination” can be as violent as the silencing of noise.³¹

Silence – which Maurice Blanchot regarded as “the space of literature”³² – reveals the social character of man’s kind of being through its role in dialogue. Dialogue employs an established language and refers to a world which is recognized as antedating that dialogue; in short, it establishes a logic of inherence, or “being-in-the-world”. This antecedent world is one in which we can also detect the traces of previous human performances.³³ In principle, ‘the phenomenon of

²⁷ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp.3-4.

²⁸ Jean-Louis Chrétien, ‘Silence in Painting’, *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp.18-61; p.19.

²⁹ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p.4

³⁰ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p.4.

³¹ Jael Kraut, ‘Phénoménologie du silence,’ in Yves Mayzaud and Gregori Jean, *Le langage et ses phénomènes* (Paris : Harmattan, 2007), pp.137-151 ; p.141. Cf. Max Picard’s comment on broadcasting.

³² Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p.48.

³³ ‘Silence is rightly said to be unsurpassable because it holds sway over the occurrence of all strictly human performances...performances which are mediational or directly linked to mediations.’ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence*:

silence and its appropriate ontological interpretation do not preclude as foolish any claims concerning origin, culmination, and definitive sense of the interplay between man and world.' By its nature, silence is non-judgemental: it provides a space for dialogue and neither silence nor its interpretation 'provide a conclusive basis for adjudicating between competing claims of this sort. Man can make claims then, concerning which the evidence furnished by the phenomenon of silence and an appropriate ontological interpretation of silence permits one to say only that such claims are intelligible and not devoid of all plausibility.'³⁴ Dialogue thus 'requires a listening as its starting point. Only through first listening can a man join his own performances to those of others and thereby bring the world...to say what it means to say. This listening is accomplished through silence.'³⁵

The point here has not been to affirm a theological warrant³⁶ for silence, but simply to outline its ontological value in: *Dasein* is all "doors and windows" through which noise enters in³⁷ amid conditions of mutual speech and hearing.

ii) The temporal phenomenality of silence

If one understands silence by reference to Bergson's concept of the "*néant*"³⁸ then, as Jael Kraut has argued, there are two ontological possibilities. Firstly, silence provides a blank canvas upon which all the noises of the universe appear. This implies that there was an initial primordial silence followed by an explosion of noise which overwhelmed it; this silence eternally antedates

The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p.185.

³⁴ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p.189.

³⁵ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p.184.

³⁶ The popularity of apophatic theology in postmodernity is merely one example; Dauenhauer concedes '...that a hierarchical arrangement of a multiplicity of types within each region has positive warrant' but it is only if, like Picard, one makes the move to faith, that 'such a hierarchy may have some basis.' Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp.192-3. Dauenhauer's position, he maintains, 'does not preclude such a supplementation which might justify a hierarchy.' But without this supplementation his 'interpretation offers no support to any sort of hierarchy.'

³⁷ If the question of ontotheology revolves around the dialogue between Greek and Christian epistemology, it is worth here recalling the experience Augustine in the garden at Ostia (recorded in *Confessions*) and the importance of "social epistemology": the presence of his mother Monica (thereby making it a shared, social experience) undoes the Plotinian model – typically, Plotinian union required that the soul be no longer conscious of her body, no longer conscious of herself as distinct from the One, and thus could not be conscious of another person. By contrast, the Christian hope of resurrection holds out that 'individuality will always be our condition.' Janet Martin Soskice, 'Monica's Tears: Augustine on Words and Speech', *New Blackfriars* 83:980 (October 2002), pp.448-458; p.455

³⁸ Cf. Henri Bergson, « L'existence et le néant », *L'Evolution créatrice (Œuvres, Edition du Centenaire, Presses Universitaires de France, 1959)*, pp.728-746.

noise and surrounds every object in the world. Second, if there has always been something like noise (which, as the example of Cage demonstrates, is, in our embodied existence, inescapable), then silence is not given, but forces aside that eternal noise, like a violent irruption or interruption in the ‘virgin noises of being’.³⁹ In short, silence is itself a form of “non-being” that contradicts the logic of ontotheology. Both of these possibilities have theological implications.

For phenomenology, it is impossible to discuss silence without first listening to the consciousness which thinks that silence, a silence which is neither an abstraction nor a belief, but lived.⁴⁰ This silence is linked to each and every sound that is produced, and thereby to time: silence has a ‘describable temporality of its own...not radically derived from the temporality of the utterance with which it is conjoined.’⁴¹ Dauenhauer thus identifies a distinct form of silence: intervening silence (which punctuates the words and phrases of an utterance) which constitutes the timing and pacing of our utterances and possesses its own temporal structure besides that of the concrete utterances of which it is a part. Dauenhauer (referring to Edmund Husserl’s *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*⁴²) suggests that an intervening silence, A¹, contains elements of both its preceding utterance, A, and its protended successor related to the three constituent moments of “*Urimpression*” (“*Urempfindung*”), “*Retention*” and “*Protention*”. For a consciousness endowed with memory, hopes, and a body which can keep silent, then silence signifies not simply an absence of words but the necessary temporality of life. As Lacoste observes, ‘there is a time to speak, a time to be silent and a time to heal.’⁴³

Without this silent understanding of temporality our aesthetic life – particularly music – would also be impossible. The appeal for silence by an orchestra⁴⁴ at the beginning of their performance is nothing other than an appeal to our intentionality – that, through an act of *ascesis*, of

³⁹ Jael Kraut, ‘Phénoménologie du silence,’ in Yves Mayzaud and Gregori Jean, *Le langage et ses phénomènes* (Paris : Harmattan, 2007), pp.137-151; p.141.

⁴⁰ Jael Kraut, ‘Phénoménologie du silence,’ p.143.

⁴¹ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p.5.

⁴² Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, ed. Martin Heidegger, trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), §8, pp.44-45, and §11, pp.50-52.

⁴³ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, *Présence et parousie* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2006), pp.169-191; p.180.

⁴⁴ Jael Kraut, ‘Phénoménologie du silence,’ p.139.

self-denial, we create an appropriate environment for that performance and the possibility of the appearance of that piece of music, not just on their behalf but on behalf of our neighbour; thus not keeping silent represents an offence against the dignity of the other person.

iii) Aesthetics and silence⁴⁵

‘Where,’ wonders Lacoste, ‘does one find a conversation more infinite than in theology?’⁴⁶

In *The Infinite Conversation* Maurice Blanchot warns that ‘[w]e never speak without deciding whether the violence of reason that wants to give proof and be right or the violence of the possessive self that wants to extend itself and prevail will once again be the rule of discourse.’⁴⁷ We will not spend time here on the “Cartesian meditations” that have so occupied Husserl and Marion, other than to note, with Blanchot that ‘Descartes did not venture to assert that everything is thought; he contented himself with the understanding that all thought is language.’ As Blanchot observes, ‘silence exists; “it is not death and it is not speech”; there is then, something that is neither indifference nor discourse’⁴⁸. Confronted by the “chatter” of Danish daily life in a bourgeois-philistine age where ‘[o]nly the person who can remain essentially silent can speak essentially, can act essentially’⁴⁹ – Kierkegaard proposed the foundation of what has been described as a ‘Trappist-like aesthetic order to shut up the chatter of the day’⁵⁰. Understood thus, in the hollow drama of a ‘public’ sphere created by the press⁵¹ where the only values are those of commodity and celebrity, human individuality becomes enslaved to the vagaries of fashion and the market. In such a context, where language is a debased currency of bankrupt words, then ‘the appeal to silence is a tactical

⁴⁵ Silence exists in dialectic with utterance. Susan Sontag writes: “‘Silence’ never ceases to imply its opposite and to depend on its presence: just as there can’t be “up” without “down”...so one must acknowledge a surrounding environment of sound or language in order to recognize silence.’ Silence then can be conceived as a necessary condition for utterance, ‘somehow coordinate with utterance.’ ‘The Aesthetics of Silence,’ in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), p.11.

⁴⁶ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, *Présence et parousie* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2006), pp.169-191; p.189.

⁴⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.212.

⁴⁸ Maurice Blanchot. ‘Studies on language’, *Faux Pas*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p.89.

⁴⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review*, trans. Edward Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p.97.

⁵⁰ Steven Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard, Language and the Reality of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p.111.

⁵¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review*, trans. Edward Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p.90.

ploy, to escape the fabrication and evasions of language'. In this setting, silence '*signifies* – it alerts us to that in our experience which cannot be assimilated by the system, the order of knowledge.'⁵² And yet, this same commentator detects in this attempt by Kierkegaard to go beyond the 'messy ambiguities' of language the same 'unattainable fantasy', a similar 'idealization of silence'⁵³ that underscores both the seducer's desire for immediacy and the believer's direct, silent relation to God. Despite the fact that in several of Kierkegaard's texts 'the cultivation of silence is given religious prominence'⁵⁴, Shakespeare remains suspicious of the desire that words 'transcend their indirectness and learn to obey duty immediately, or meet God face to face' or that the 'wordless unknowing which mystics have evoked as the culmination of the spiritual path might encourage us to tread a linguistic *via negativa*'; for him, 'silence occurs as a motif in those of Kierkegaard's texts which either betray an unwelcome similarity to that of the seducer or place silence in a self-consciously ironic context.'⁵⁵ As a good student of Derrida, Shakespeare holds that religious language remains open to 'this or that interpretation, and whilst the 'silent, direct encounter' might seem to satisfy humanity's spiritual quest, Shakespeare maintains that the 'art of cultivating silence' is as open to interpretation as its linguistic counterpart.

This openness reveals that listening is nothing less than the primal act of hospitality and the occasion of "the infinite conversation". The phenomenologist Jean-Louis Chrétien describes it as 'that which we can give, body and soul, both in the street and at the side of the road, when we would otherwise offer neither roof, nor fire, nor cover.' It can be given at any time and anywhere and provides the ethical condition 'of all other hospitalities, since bitter is the bread that one eats without having shared conversation, hard and heavy with insomnia are beds where one may lay without our fatigue being welcomed and respected.'⁵⁶ As we shall suggest, this ethical aspect is

⁵² Steven Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard, Language and the Reality of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p.111.

⁵³ Steven Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard*, p.113.

⁵⁴ Steven Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard*, p.110.

⁵⁵ Steven Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard*, p.110.

⁵⁶ Chrétien adds a religious coda, 'And the ultimate hospitality, that of the Lord, will it not fall, dizzily, into the luminous listening of the Word, listening in order to speak, speaking in order to listen? Listening is pregnant with eternity.' « La première hospitalité n'est autre que l'écoute. C'est celle que corps et âme nous pouvons donner jusque dans la rue et sur le bord des routes, quand nous n'aurions à proposer ni toit, ni feu, ni couvert. Et c'est à tout instant qu'elle peut aussi être donnée. De toutes les autres hospitalités elle forme la condition, car amer est le pain qu'on mange

crucial.

4) Silent knowledge

Dauenhauer's phenomenology of silence suggests that 'to accomplish anything...is to be involved with the world just as it is, with all of its residues from previous human performances. This involvement with the world is initiated in perception and is revealed, through the performance of silence, as an involvement in an interplay rather than as absorption into an identity.'⁵⁷ This pre-eminence of the indeterminate is expressed most clearly in the performance of silence, both to its author and their audience. Silence and the world, in their 'primordial union, jointly constitute the unsurpassable foundation for specific human performances and their objects...where man as the interrogator who primordially listens to the world brings the things of the world to presence.'⁵⁸ The world is both present and absent, neither completely present nor completely absent.

Lacoste's analysis is rooted in a similar understanding of the pre-discursive donation of the world to the self, prior to any well formed language: in the silence of the perceptive life, an order is established and deployed, an order whose richness continues to manifest itself, that of the world and of the presence of subjectivity in the world. The Husserlian examination of that silent life, suggests Lacoste, has inspired much of the best contemporary philosophical work. The later philosophy of Husserl, following the *Logical Investigations*, may even be described as a theory of deferred or "bracketed" speech. The pages devoted to topics such as "passive syntheses", "active syntheses", and "antipredicative evidences" amply demonstrate that things, which are given to consciousness as phenomena, both constitute and are formed within the sphere of the silent life of our consciousness.⁵⁹ Words themselves are certainly so many phenomena, and things are, of course, certainly given to us through the mediation of words. But it is in the margin of those words that, in

sans que la parole ait été partagée, durs et lourds d'insomnie sont les lits où l'on se couche sans que notre fatigue ait été accueillie et respectée. Et l'ultime hospitalité, celle du Seigneur, ne sera-t-elle pas de tomber, vertigineusement, dans l'écoute lumineuse du Verbe, l'écoutant pour parler, parlant pour l'écouter ? L'écoute est grosse d'éternité. » Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Christus* n° 176 (October 1997).

⁵⁷ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p.184.

⁵⁸ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p.185.

⁵⁹ Jean-Yves Lacoste, 'La connaissance silencieuse : Des evidences antepredicatives à une critique de l'apophasie', *Présence et parousie* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2006), pp.117-144; p.117.

the Husserlian descriptions, nearly all conscious life is organized – to the extent that Husserl’s research on intersubjectivity devotes only marginal attention to the fact of interlocution. What, wonders Lacoste, is happening, where speech does not intervene, and which dispenses with its services? This complex fact he suggests can be grouped under a general title, that of a “prediscursive gift” of the world.

The demands of phenomenological method require that one take a step behind logic and the apophatic in order to ground them both in a cognitive silent life: the familiar and affective life of things and the world. It is here that philosophy has its own silent moment⁶⁰ – compassion is an extension of our co-affectivity; the more that Husserl pursued his descriptions (later published as *Experience and Judgement*) the more that the sphere of the pre-predicative appears to him as anticipating – even in detail – the work of *logos*, or predicative language. The affective life has the power to reveal clearly and distinctly the reality of the world: anxiety reveals the non-being which perpetual threatens being, the death that forever threatens life. And in later Heideggerian texts, another affect, boredom, provides a revelation of the world. But there are ambiguous events as well; Scheler noted the distinction between *Gefühl* and *fühlen von etwas*, between the empty feeling of an object and our intentional feeling

Lacoste notes that a recurrent Kantian temptation in Husserl (which eventually triumphed in *Ideas II*) led him to favour spontaneity and the power of constitution. But elsewhere, in the phenomenology of passivity as well as in the phenomenology of constitution, speech is nonetheless required to speak about an order of the world or an order of things whose essentials have already been guaranteed in silence; this order is destined merely to be named and to be described. But although predicates and relations are named and defined, an experience of what these words *mean* has already been constructed – without speaking – in the experience of the consciousness which perceives and constitutes them.

For his fellow phenomenologist Jean-Louis Chrétien silence is laden with meaning; the only

⁶⁰ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘La connaissance silencieuse : Des evidences antepredicatives à une critique de l’apophasie’, 118.

meaningful word is born of silence. Speech necessarily takes risks ‘because it is always the *unheard-of* that it wants to say, when it really wants to say something. The silence within events is what we want to bring into speech. In this way, the voice blazes for itself a trail that was not marked out in advance, a trail that it can in no way follow. It can be strong only in its weakness. Its sole authority lies in being venturesome, and so its trembling must always bear the hallmark of the silence from which it emerges: sometimes it is a toneless voice that alone can express the unheard-of.’⁶¹

2) Theological aspects of silence

i) Silence and religion

Silence has enjoys a long and distinguished religious history. ‘[L]anguage, observes Blanchot, is ‘devoted to a ‘frozen analysis’ but can be suddenly ‘tempted by song’⁶² a ‘frozen analysis’ can be suddenly ‘tempted by song’ in a manner reminiscent of the ‘Silent music, Sounding solitude, The supper that refreshes, and deepens love’⁶³ which is found in the spirituality of John of the Cross. For his part, John Cassian sought to explain:

that fiery and, indeed, more properly speaking, wordless prayer which is known and experienced by very few. This transcends all human understanding and is distinguished not . . . by a sound of the voice or a movement of the tongue or a pronunciation of words. Rather, the mind is aware of it when it is illuminated by an infusion of heavenly light from it, and not by narrow human words, and once the understanding has been suspended it gushes forth as from a most abundant fountain and speaks ineffably to God, producing more in that very brief moment than the self-conscious mind is able to articulate easily or to reflect upon.⁶⁴

Nonetheless, silence does not enjoy a completely positive status. Dostoevsky, we are told, warns against ‘the death of language: the malign silence of apathy’⁶⁵ or the ‘silence of

⁶¹ ‘The distress inherent to airport novels and hit songs lies precisely in the fact that, by providing simple-hearted people with formulae of pure convention and worn-out, devalued expressions with which to express their joys and their pains, they deprive them of access to speech, they forbid its stammerings, and they thus deprive men of their own existence. There is something really vampiric about this. An arrogant vulgarity flourishes at the expense of all who listen to it. Then there is nothing left between the nakedness of the unsayable and the off-the-peg formulae that are all ready to wear, in which nobody speaks and nothing is said.’ Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Ark of Speech*, trans. Andrew Brown (London: Routledge, 2004), p.13.

⁶² Maurice Blanchot. ‘Studies on language’, *Faux Pas*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p.213.

⁶³ Saint John of the Cross, *John of the Cross: Selected Writings*, ed. Kieran Kavanaugh, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), p.245. Cf. Nelson Pike, *Mystic Union: An Essay in the Phenomenology of Mysticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p.57.

⁶⁴ John Cassian, *John Cassian: The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, O.P., The Works of the Fathers in Translation, 57 [New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1997], Ninth Conference, c. 25, 345–46).

⁶⁵ Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (Continuum, 2008), p.12.

nonrecognition'⁶⁶; 'silence and death' are the product of 'Diabolical authorship'.⁶⁷ Thus 'if the Devil's aim is silence, God's is speech, the dialogic speech by which we shape each other'⁶⁸ instead of 'the absent God whose silence and inaction are the origin of evil.'⁶⁹ But an ethical silence remains in '...Bakhtin's growing interest in authorial "silence" as it is hinted at in the Christ-like figures in Dostoevsky's novels – those who...offer time and space to others.' These figures represent the continuation of what Ruth Coates called "the kenotic motif of active self-renunciation, as responsible authors/others facilitate the self-disclosure of their partners in dialogue rather than impose a definition from without." Thus, responsibility 'is a bracketing and quieting of the self's agenda for the sake of another voice'.⁷⁰ This theme is one which occupied both Levinas and Blanchot⁷¹; Lacoste, as we shall see, takes up this theme with regard to the task of theology.

For Kierkegaard the task was not merely to polemicize *contra* modernity but how to live and to communicate faith in, with and under the conditions of modernity⁷² (to which one could now add the conditions of Western postmodern and phonocentric culture). This postmodernity is often characterised by Derridean notions of "unsaying" and by a revival of interest in apophatic spirituality (Marion has writing extensively on the place of Pseudo-Denys in the articulation of post-metaphysical theology); as Dauenhauer notes: 'The unsaid is the inexhaustible source of Saying and is a permanent determinate of it. Whereas man can bring Saying to human word, the unsaid can only be acknowledged in silence. The unsaid is at both the origin and the termination of any Saying. The silence in which the unsaid is acknowledged is at both the origin and the termination of any human words which bring Saying to speech. The Saying and its source to which man responds is not sheerly indeterminate.'⁷³

⁶⁶ Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p.133.

⁶⁷ Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p.179.

⁶⁸ Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p.113.

⁶⁹ Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p.107.

⁷⁰ Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p.172.

⁷¹ Cf. William Large, *Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Blanchot: Ethics and the Ambiguity of Writing* (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2005).

⁷² This is the essence of George Pattison's criticism of Ronald L. Hall's *Word and Spirit: A Kierkegaardian Critique of the Modern Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) in his review for *Literature and Theology* 8:3 (1994), p.332-3, p.333. Pattison also wrote the entry on Kierkegaard for Lacoste's *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*.

⁷³ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University

Such apophatic spirituality is itself characterised by the “unsaying” (*apophasis*) of language for God, specifically a mode of discourse in which God is approached using a dialectical structure of affirmation and negation, with a particular temporal emphasis on the negative *moment*. There are echoes here – albeit discrete ones – of the notion of non-experience elaborated by Hans Urs von Balthasar, where this moment represents the stripping away by the celebrant or worshipper of those attitudes, mental images and ideas which might inhibit their active pursuit of a relationship with God. In this regard it represents a path of training (*ascesis*) intended to make room for God by bracketing out the world in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the classical Husserlian phenomenological reduction. In particular, this reduction is one of silence, in which the pilgrim learns to keep silence. In this religious register, keeping or being silent offers an opportunity for the recollection of man’s status as *coram deo*: ‘the state of the person’s being with the Other that is closer to him than he is to himself.’⁷⁴ The experience of originary and terminal silence reveals the familiar demonic element in silence, which Picard sought to exorcise through faith. Dauenhauer remarks that ‘Picard’s insight here is that the experience of silence is such that man can, by a leap, aim at resolving the experienced polyvalence of silence by deciding to take one of its dimensions as unequivocally primary.’⁷⁵ In short, it is a spiritual strategy, an open concept adopted in this world to describe another.

Rachel Muers describes silence as ‘the interruption of the everyday and the delimitation of an alternative space – a characteristic of the liturgy as a whole – may be said to be “performed,” and not only represented, most fully in the keeping of silence.’⁷⁶ Muers, in dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, indicates that an interlocutor with God should in some way take an apophatic stance and, along with this, accept liability to the openness of a wordless, undetermined (at least from the human side) relationship. She writes: ‘[P]ractices of silence in worship call further into question the

Press, 1980), p.187.

⁷⁴ William L. Brownsberger, ‘Silence,’ *Communio* 36 (2009) pp.586-606; p.587.

⁷⁵ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p.188.

⁷⁶ Rachel Muers, *Keeping God’s Silence: Towards a Theological Ethics of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 147.

idea that the ‘ultimate,’ God’s ‘givenness,’ and its realization in the world, can be described best or only in terms of a *word* spoken—and raise the question of whether both the being-in-relation of God and the being-in-relation of human persons may exceed what can be spoken or signified’.⁷⁷

ii) Ethics and the silencing of theology

Levinas sought, in place of the lost transcendence of Western philosophy, to remind us of ‘the impossibility of indifference...before the misfortunes and faults of a neighbour’⁷⁸ while in theology Kunnemann suggests that now ‘the name of God [is] connected with caring, morally involved, loving relationships both between people mutually and on the level of person’.⁷⁹ Lacoste offers us a telling example of theology “being silenced”: that of its being silenced in the face of the suffering of others.⁸⁰ In these remarks on theodicy, Lacoste makes clear that we are not dealing here with a problem capable of one day receiving its solution, but something rather more like a mystery or a scandal: ‘a scandal because every faith can collapse in the face of the experience of evil, a mystery because no response is heard which does not include some reference to “the words from the cross”. And this is truly where the most responsible theology is silent’⁸¹

To sympathise, then, is also to suffer-with, and our compassion demands that we do not discuss the suffering of others without also feeling it as our own. The major religious traditions have sought in personal knowledge (the knowledge that human beings acquire of themselves and of each other through networks of relationship) the least inappropriate analogy or metaphor for the character of the relations between human beings and God (and hence the centrality, in what we do say about God, of motifs such as “gift” and “utterance”).⁸²

The experience of compassion forces us to admit that the relation of one man to another is

⁷⁷ Muers, *Keeping God’s Silence*, p.151

⁷⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘God and Philosophy,’ *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp.129-148; p.142.

⁷⁹ Harry Kunneman, *Voorbij het dikke-ik: bouwstenen voor en kritisch humanisme* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij SWP, 2005), p.67.

⁸⁰ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, *Présence et parousie* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2006), pp.169-191; p.169.

⁸¹ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, p.171.

⁸² Nicholas Lash, ‘Attending to Silence’, *Holiness, Speech and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p.86.

beyond the limits of mere “co-being” or Heideggerian⁸³ “care” [*Mitdasein Fürsorge*], although in pondering the question of how God might appear Lacoste refers to Heidegger’s concept of *Befindlichkeit*⁸⁴ and how the affective life – notably love – possesses cognitive content:

In an all-important passage of *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes affection, *Befindlichkeit*, as endowed with cognitive abilities. He then praises Scheler for having rediscovered these abilities, following impulses by Augustine and Blaise Pascal. And there...he quotes both Augustine and Pascal. According to Augustine, *non intratur in veritatem nisi per caritatem*: one does not reach truth except through love. And according to Pascal, who develops Augustine’s maxim, ‘in the case we are speaking of human things, it is said to be necessary to know them before we can love... But the saints, on the contrary, when they speak of divine things, say we must love them before we know them, and that we enter into truth only through charity.’⁸⁵

And to feel it as our own ‘is to learn that he who suffers is, above all, waiting for us to hold their hand, not because we are not able to speak intelligently, but because with him we have exceeded the limits expressible by means of argumentation.’⁸⁶ There is a time to speak and a time to be quiet.⁸⁷ It is at this point that the “liturgical gesture” transcends the capacities of speech, reminding us once again that ‘[k]eeping silent does not mean the same as being absent.’⁸⁸

This compassionate silence serves as a reminder that theology is only able to speak of God by stating that he is a God to whom man can talk, a reminder that ‘it is a theologically fruitful experience to be quiet in order to pray and to sympathise.’⁸⁹ Lacoste’s phenomenological analysis therefore distinguishes Heideggerian from Christian forms of liturgy and follows the Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar’s refusal to separate “love” and “being” (in the way that Marion does) amid genuine concern that ‘any scheme in which the self or community finds the

⁸³ Heidegger notably ‘deals only with the discourse and silence of creative men.’ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p.186.

⁸⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p.178 and note on p.492

⁸⁵ ‘We can prove *ab absurdo* the rightness of the argument. Could God appear to us and not be loved? Can we figure an experience of a non-lovable God? Otto’s *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*, admittedly, is no lovable object. The primal experience in Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith* (that is, the feeling of absolute dependence) makes no room for love.’ Lacoste continues, ‘And I am ready to admit that in such experiences, if we stick to interpreting them from a theological point of view, God hides himself more than he discloses himself. What I have just said, nonetheless, was no slip of the tongue, and I intend to suggest that God can appear, paradoxically, as a hidden God – or more precisely, that it belongs to God’s disclosure that his hiddenness is ever greater.’ See Jean-Yves Lacoste, trans. Aaron Patrick Riches, ‘Perception, Transcendence and the Experience of God’, in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler (eds.), *Transcendence and Phenomenology* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2007), pp.1-20; pp.15-16; *La phénoménalité de Dieu*, pp.48-49.

⁸⁶ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, *Présence et parousie* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2006), pp.169-191; pp.171-2.

⁸⁷ ‘Theology is “authentic” when talking about time and the unforeseen.’ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, p.180.

⁸⁸ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, p.171.

⁸⁹ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, p.173.

satisfaction of its desire in what bedazzles’⁹⁰ is idolatrous. Instead we are in search of *recognition*, particularly the recognition of the fact that only love is to be perceived.⁹¹ To sympathize then is also to “pray-with” – the two cannot be differentiated for Lacoste. To someone who is suffering, theology cannot say “why” he is suffering, or what “meaning” his suffering has other than that the theologian should exhibit the ‘elementary tact or good sense to turn the gaze of the sufferer toward him in whom God has suffered.’⁹² Here, then, compassion quickly leads to ‘talk of a compassionate God, [and] to preserve the language of the cross...’⁹³ Lacoste here hints at what has been recognised as one of the principle concerns of Michel de Certeau: if the attempt to speak about God ‘is neither analogical nor heterological but *alogical*... what then of Jesus, who is, in classical Christian confession, the logos of God?’⁹⁴ Although Certeau certainly believed that a relationship to Jesus provided the ‘single criterion for Christianity, Jesus was for him an *anti*-logos or, perhaps better, a “crucified” logos.’⁹⁵ As Nicholas Lash points out, Gethsemane provides the theological paradigm: ‘Jesus speaks and, when he has spoken, there is silence. There is no suggestion, in the structure of the narrative, that he expected a reply.’⁹⁶ Certeau’s presentation of Jesus as a particular, historically situated person – ‘one of the “stubborn details” to which we cling’⁹⁷ in ‘our desire to be faithful’ which both prevents – and protects – us from speaking a universal discourse. This is at odds with

⁹⁰ Cyril O’Regan, ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Unwelcoming of Heidegger’, in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler (eds.), *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2010), pp.264-298; p.273.

⁹¹ The *leitmotif* of von Balthasar can be clearly felt at this point: ‘If God wishes to reveal the love that he harbors for the world, this love has to be something that the world can recognize, in spite of, or in fact in, its being wholly other. The inner reality of love can be recognized only by love. In order for a selfish beloved to understand the selfless love of a lover (not only as something he can use, which happens to serve better than other things, but rather as what it truly is), he must already have some glimmer of love, some initial sense of what it is. [...] Knowledge (with its whole complex of intuition and concept) comes into play, because the play of love has already begun beforehand, initiated by the mother, the transcendent. God interprets himself to man as love in the same way: he radiates love, which kindles the light of love in the heart of man, and it is precisely this light that allows man to perceive this, the absolute Love: “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’, who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6).’ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), pp.75-76.

⁹² Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, p.172.

⁹³ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, p.171.

⁹⁴ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, ‘The Otherness of God’, in Ian Buchanan (ed.), ‘Michel de Certeau – in the Plural’ *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100:2 (2001), pp.349-364; p.358.

⁹⁵ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, ‘The Otherness of God’, p.358. Cf. Michel de Certeau, *La faiblesse de croire*, ed. Luce Giard (Paris, 1987), p.209 and Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, ‘The Wounds of Christ,’ *Journal of Literature and Theology* 5 (1991), pp.83-100.

⁹⁶ Nicholas Lash, ‘Attending to Silence’, *Holiness, Speech and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p.75.

⁹⁷ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, ‘The Otherness of God’, p.358.

the move to *horizontal* transcendence suggested by Kunneman; the Christian practice of silence ‘must be rooted in some respect in the life of Christ himself if it is to be meaningful or even in some way normative’⁹⁸ and one here need only recall Christ’s silence before Pilate, Herod and the High Priest (Mt 26:62-63, 27:12, 14; Mk 14:60-61, 15:5; Jn 19:9). Since the Gospel itself is transmitted in four canonical texts whose harmonization is impossible this has ecclesiological implications; Matthew 12:36 warns that we shall be held to account “for every careless word” [πάν ῥήμα ἀργόν].

Rachel Muers revisits Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s thought to suggest that even Christ experiences the temptation to distort and ignore that which exceeds and counters a purely human account of things: ‘Christ as the “weak” Word is exposed, not only to the possibility of mishearing, but to the possibility of being silenced by the word that claims universal validity – and condemns that “whereof it cannot speak” to be passed over in silence. The stark alternatives put forward in the Christology introduction – “Either man must die or he kills Jesus” – draw attention to the violence of the human *logos* that reduces the person – here the person of Christ – a mute object of enquiry.’⁹⁹ Jean-Louis Chrétien refers to Christ’s silence in his infancy: ‘The *Verbum infans* is Speech that does not speak, that cannot speak, Speech deprived of speech. In coming to reveal himself to us, the Word began by becoming silent.’¹⁰⁰ This is the crucial Christological difference between “being for others” and “being with others”¹⁰¹.

Nonetheless, like any historical figure Jesus is silenced by death – even his tomb is empty, silent. But it is in this disappearance – his absence – that Jesus becomes a sign of God *semper maior*: the absence of the risen Jesus, at least for Certeau, is conceived as a letting be, a creative activity on the part of a God *plus grand* which ‘gives witness to the Father and gives way to the Christian community’¹⁰² in whose interstices God is to be found, even as it is subjected to the clash

⁹⁸ William L. Brownsberger, ‘Silence,’ *Communio* 36 (2009) pp.586-606; p.595.

⁹⁹ Rachel Muers, *Keeping God’s Silence: Toward a Theological Ethics of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p.117.

¹⁰⁰ Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), p.44.

¹⁰¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: III/2 The Doctrine of Creation*, eds. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), §45.

¹⁰² Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, ‘The Otherness of God’, in Ian Buchanan (ed.), ‘Michel de Certeau – in the Plural’ *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100:2 (2001), pp.349-364; p.358.

of interpretations¹⁰³ that shatters¹⁰⁴ the ecclesial and eucharistic body¹⁰⁵; Lacoste himself refers to the persistence of “intra-ecclesiological sin” in which theology is ‘the work of sinners,’ whose first sin is to treat God as an object, to speak of him as the being that is more important than anything else.’¹⁰⁶ What is at stake for Certeau, suggests Bauerschmidt, is our ability ‘to hear these organizing silences...to listen to the silence of the unnameable...[to] master the...marginalized vocabularies’¹⁰⁷ because ‘when we attempt to speak of God in a world of equivocity, the most we can say is that God is *non aliud*’¹⁰⁸. Marginalised, ‘confined to the white eschatology of death, God falls silent, and we no longer lift our voices in prayer. We simply speak to others, hoping they will hear the silence that structures our speech’¹⁰⁹.

Lacoste is not as melancholic as Certeau, although, like Certeau he understands the transformative value of turning nihilism into tragedy; he undertakes what one might term, after Husserl, a silent reduction: ‘Being silenced, or at any rate having its arguments reduced to silence, theology finds itself reduced to an essential; and this essential is that it is *theologia viatorum*, the theology of men in the world and not the theology of angels and the blessed; that it is not just a province of knowledge but a way of existing and of existing in the plural.’¹¹⁰

In saying that ‘the theologian is capable of performing other functions than that of an interpreter of rationality is to say that theology is a form of existence before it is an intellectual work, and that compassionate silence is an integral part of theological experience. Keeping silent certainly concedes that argument no longer holds, but this is not to abdicate every theological project: it is merely to demonstrate that the theological experience would be incomplete if one reduced it solely to a work of conceptual construction.’¹¹¹ In forcing theology to be quiet, the task

¹⁰³ Michel de Certeau, *L'étranger; ou, L'union dans la différence*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1991), p.41.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Michel de Certeau, *Le christianisme éclaté* (Paris, 1974).

¹⁰⁵ *La faiblesse de croire*, pp.215-6 discusses Christianity as a *complexio oppositorum*.

¹⁰⁶ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Étude IX: « *Resurrectio carnis* » Du savoir théologique à la connaissance liturgique’, *La phénoménalité de Dieu: neuf études* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008), pp.205-227; p.206.

¹⁰⁷ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, ‘The Otherness of God’, p.360.

¹⁰⁸ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, ‘The Otherness of God’, pp.360-361.

¹⁰⁹ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, ‘The Otherness of God’, p.361.

¹¹⁰ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, *Présence et parousie* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2006), pp.169-191; p.172.

¹¹¹ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, *Présence et parousie* (Geneva: Ad

accomplished by suffering is in forcing it also to remember that theological experience is not a solitary one but one lived in the element of an original plurality. This plural existence is one that recognises the polysemy of both silence and the scriptural witness. Theology is primarily an act of speaking; that is why it can also be an act of silence and Lacoste here interweaves the vertical and horizontal aspects of transcendence.

At this point it is worth revisiting Kierkegaard, and asking, in light of this, whether Shakespeare's criticisms still hold. 'All misapprehension,' writes Kierkegaard, 'stems from speech, more specifically from a comparison that is implicit in talking, especially in conversation.'¹¹² If one seeks to avoid misunderstanding [*misforstaaelse*] then one must either avoid language or create silence [*taushed*] in language by refusing to compare oneself to another, thereby avoiding its distractions. Kierkegaard's discourse refers to the friends of Job: 'But silence respects the worry and respects the worried one as Job's friends did, who out of respect sat silent with the sufferer and held him in respect'¹¹³; indeed, sat there in silence, 'their presence prompted Job to compare himself to himself'; this is quite different from when the Lord eventually answered Job 'out of the whirlwind' (Job 38:1). Elsewhere, of course, the polysemic scriptural witness records with almost perverse glee Job's friends' inability to keep silent, how the possessive selves of which Blanchot warned once again wished to extend themselves, reinforcing Shakespeare's sceptical and Derridean view of phonocentrism. But as regards what one might term "the natural silence of compassion" explored by Lacoste, Jolita Pons comments further that 'if silence is one of the conditions to avoid the misunderstanding of comparison, then the lily and the bird are indeed perfect examples since there is no language in the image... Indeed, in *The Lily in the Field and the Bird under the Sky* we are told that the first thing we can learn is silence, and 'namely because a human being can speak, it is an art to keep silent'¹¹⁴.¹¹⁵ Here then the non-human world offers, for Kierkegaard at least, a

Solem, 2006), pp.169-191; p.172.

¹¹² Søren Kierkegaard, 'To Be Contented with Being a Human Being', *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp.160-61.

¹¹³ Søren Kierkegaard, 'To Be Contented with Being a Human Being', p.161.

¹¹⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.10.

necessary ethical and ecological lesson in silence, since learning to be silent is an aspect of our being-in-the world lost amid an economy of noise¹¹⁶, one which takes on the liturgical character of interruption.

Conclusion

In a world of competing discourses about transcendence, silence helps to clarify the relation between them. As Lacoste makes clear, the price of conceptual rigor can be very high: perhaps too high – besides, the “accuracy” of our theological concepts is easily upset by the polysemy and polymorphism of the scriptural text. However, it might be achieved without paying such a price: Lacoste’s example of a theology prepared to put an end to its argument in order to make room for a practice of compassion), a theology that is also capable of speaking other than through a succession of concepts; such a theology is unsystematic. Lacoste therefore proposes ‘an asystematic theology of the fragment’¹¹⁷ – a *fragmentary* understanding, but an *understanding* nonetheless.¹¹⁸ A theology which agrees to be silenced; a theology that agrees to be only a marginal note to the scriptural text, this is a theology which understands its own *logos*, which is a coherent but fragmentary understanding of God in history. Despite the ambitious claims of Hegel regarding *immanent* transcendence, God is not made manifest to us. Lacoste’s rigorous eschatology reinforces this point – the once and for all character of the Christ-event, recorded in history and recounted in a plurality of narratives, defies the hypocritical chatter of the theologian, and as a contextual discipline theology is an unsystematic, fragmentary and, above all, *ethical* activity, one which, just as it interweaves the vertical and horizontal types and calls to mind Stoker’s account of Derrida and the fourth type of *messianic* transcendence, also moves *beyond* its textual slavery.

¹¹⁵ Jolita Pons, ‘On Imitating the Inimitable: Example, Comparison, and Prototype,’ in Robert L. Perkins, ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Volume 15 - Uplifting Discourses in Various Spirits* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), pp.173-197; p.177.

¹¹⁶ ‘[T]he noise of radio destroys man. Man who should confront objects concretely is deprived of the power of present concrete experience. This is what makes the man who lives in this world of radio so bad-tempered, so ill at ease: everything is thrown at him by the radio, but nothing is really there at all. Everything slips away from him.’ Max Picard, *The World of Silence*, trans. Stanley Godman (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), p.199. Cf. p.62: ‘The man whose nature is still possessed by silence moves out from the silence into the outside world. The silence is central in the man.’

¹¹⁷ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, *Présence et parousie* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2006), pp.169-191; p.189.

¹¹⁸ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’; p.190.

Silence is not itself transcendence: it is a condition of our temporality, the possibility of our being, and a strategy – as polysemic as the scriptural narrative, and one of the practices of everyday life analysed by Michel de Certeau. And as Bauerschmidt has pointed out, for Certeau that which appears in the face of our idle questions ‘is *not* the God of ontotheology...precisely because it is not thought within the confines of “being” and thus cannot be thought as “first being” or, likewise, as “first other.”’ For Certeau, ‘God appears...as the blinding, obliterating glory of the white eschatology of death. And yet this glory appears in the white silences that structure “mystic speech” and those that organize the kind of tactical silences that Certeau analyzes so acutely.’¹¹⁹

Keeping silent, therefore, is an immanent activity, one conducted in the ‘mundane reality’ of this world; bound by a logic of inherence – being-in-the-world, listening in community – it is an activity of *kenosis* quite unlike that of Altizer, one that exemplifies Stoker’s typology of the open concept: ‘a pattern or template that is filled in by content, by a certain type of spirituality’. Silence indicates the (voluntary) concealment of self and the individual’s withdraw from society and the crowd [*das Mann* in the Heideggerian register] and yet, in a compassionate, religious or liturgical setting, one often – perhaps paradoxically – keeps silence in company (not unlike the horizontal shift in transcendence identified by Kunneman) an act which aims to reinforce human solidarity, and where theology is the practice of charity (*caritas*) in the midst of a community.¹²⁰ Silence is also then an act of *ascesis*, a stripping away of attitudes, mental images and ideas that cuts across notions of radical immanence and transcendence, of a purely textual reality and into non-linguistic forms of culture.

¹¹⁹ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, ‘The Otherness of God’, in Ian Buchanan (ed.), ‘Michel de Certeau – in the Plural’ *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100:2 (2001), pp.349-364; p.360.

¹²⁰ ‘Practices of responsible silence – such as the silence of a listener – can be signs for others of the silence of God as “more than speakable,” but they must also be understood as themselves open to transformations not anticipated in advance.’ Rachel Muers, *Keeping God’s Silence: Toward a Theological Ethics of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p.215.